

1737

Deerfield

1947

Presbyterian Church

GEN

10174

Nd
Kcm

407

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1833 01750 2896

CUMBERLAND
County

GC
974.901
C91DPA

1737

1947

HISTORY
of the
DEERFIELD PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

Cumberland County
Deerfield, New Jersey

by
CLYDE M. ALLISON

This account of the origin and development of the Deerfield Presbyterian Church is not an attempt to give a comprehensive history of the Church, but to relate the origin and development of this Colonial Church to the factors in our national life which played a significant part in the story we tell.

— C. M. A.

Gratitude is expressed to Mr. Meade Landis of Greenwich, New Jersey for his advice and suggestions, particularly in locating for me the Fithian Journal which I found so helpful. Appreciation is also warmly felt for the guidance of Mr. Guy Klett of the Historical Library, Princeton, New Jersey, who assisted me in finding other data needed for this history.

C. M. A.

CHAPTER I

UNWIELDY MASS OF EARTH!

“ . . . O America! Unwieldy Mass of Earth, pleasant, & healthful, tho’ various in thy Climes — Fertile of every useful Support of Life — . . . ”

Philip Vickers Fithian, June 1, 1775

The beginnings of Presbyterianism in America and of settlement in West Jersey are equally hazy. Both depended upon rugged individualists who were independent of mind and spirit.

The Presbyterians did not come to America to organize a religious colony, but to escape tyranny. They had seen enough of repression and state religion. They wanted freedom and independence. Above all, they were a godly, sturdy, and dominant people who wore their convictions on their sleeves. It is recorded that a Scotch-Irish elder of this period prayed, “Grant, Lord, that I may be right, for Thou knowest I am hard to turn.”

Because Presbyterians did not come to this country as a colony, and colonies were not established on Presbyterian lines, such as the Quaker colony in Pennsylvania, the Dutch Reformed in New York, or the Congregationalists in New

England, the Presbyterians were scattered throughout the length of the land. They were to be found in every colony, yet wherever Presbyterians settled their individual consciences dictated that they establish their own churches.

Thus Presbyterian churches were widely scattered, largely carried on without benefit of clergy — simple, rugged, and strict. They sought religious freedom and, since this principle was first recognized in Maryland and in Pennsylvania, it was in these colonies that Presbyterianism first took root on American soil. In the colony of Maryland, the Presbyterians were first recognized under the Act of Religious Toleration as a sect against which no derogatory remarks could be made.

In 1660 the Scotch-Irish of Maryland applied to their mother Church in Northern Ireland for a minister. In answer to this plea, Francis Makemie came over to this country in 1682. He immediately went to work as a roving evangelist and founded seven churches in Maryland. He then served as circuit rider from New York to South Carolina, and was the actual founder of organized Presbyterianism in America.

Under his leadership the Presbytery of Philadelphia was organized. Thus began the ecclesiastical organization which is now the General Assembly made up of forty Synods which in turn are made up of 268 Presbyteries. The original Presbytery of Philadelphia consisted of the churches of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey. While the records of the first meeting of Presbytery are lost, the Minute Book which begins on page three indicates that a meeting was held December 27, 1706, in Freehold, New Jersey, during which time a candidate for the ministry was ordained. The second regular meeting of the Presbytery was held in

Philadelphia and was attended by four ministers and their elders.

The struggle for religious freedom was not as easily won in the other colonies as it was in Pennsylvania and Maryland. In 1707 Francis Makemie was jailed for two months for preaching without a license in New York — Presbyterians in this colony were not granted licenses by the government which supported the established Church of England. However, at his trial, Makemie was able to give such a good account of himself that, after paying a stiff fine, he was acquitted and the spirit of religious freedom gained another victory.

Whether it was independence, or whether it was courage, this struggling Church was more interested in establishing high standards than in meeting the tremendous need for ministers. Except for the few clergymen who came over from Scotland and Ireland, practically no source of ministerial supply existed to man the colonial churches. The only colleges and seminaries were in New England, and they largely supplied the Congregationalist churches. Certainly the most pressing problem which held back the advance of the Church was the problem of finding leadership for the many churches which were springing up out of nowhere. Yet the Presbyterian Church was the first denomination in colonial America to refuse to ordain untrained leaders. It has maintained this principle throughout its history; even when it has lost by doing so.

The Minutes of the Presbytery of Philadelphia on September 10, 1710, tell of a lay person, David Evans, who felt himself called to preach among the Welsh of Chester County. Presbytery unanimously agreed that he had acted "ill" in *invading* the work of the ministry. He was therefore censured.

It was agreed that he should lay aside all business and study under the direction of three ministers of Presbytery. Under this training it was four years before he was ordained.

Presbyterians have also historically believed in Creeds. In colonial America with its free religious spirit they were no exception. In so standing, they have stood apart from the many open religious organizations in America, which is so characterized by sectarian liberty. The Presbyterian Church has limited its ministry to those who accept its standards.

In 1729 the General Synod (by then Philadelphia Presbytery had been divided into four Presbyteries) accepted the Adopting Act which declared the Westminster Confession of Faith as the standard of Christian profession. “. . . And we do also agree that all Presbyterians within our bounds shall take care not to admit any candidate for the ministry . . . but what declares his agreement . . . with all the essential and necessary articles of said Confession. . .” This set the standard for the Church, and Presbyterians, few in number, armed with a dauntless determination, set out to challenge the American frontier.

The characteristics which have been revealed of the Presbyterians should indicate what would of necessity take place when a group of Scotch-Irish settled on the banks of the Cohansey. They followed the dictates of their consciences and organized what they called Presbyterian Societies. They did not call them Churches, no doubt because they did not wish to be associated with the established Church of England. The sectarianism of the American religious horizon is, without a doubt, a growth of this spirit of independence.

An account printed in the Journal of the Presbyterian His-



Deerfield Presbyterian Church after the building program of 1947



The Log Presbyterian Church of Deerfield — Built About the Year 1757
(Reproduced from the sesqui-centennial history of Deerfield Presbyterian Church)

torical Society indicates that a group of New England and Long Island Puritans came to Fairfield and were settled by 1660. The first Presbyterian Society in West Jersey was established here. It is indicated that a clergyman came with the group which first settled, though the date in which the church was organized is uncertain. In another source, the date of the organization of the church is given between 1692 and 1697. In 1727 a Mr. Daniel Elmer from New England was settled as minister of the Fairfield Congregation. It was during his pastorate that the Deerfield Church was established, and it is noted that he with many others preached at Deerfield.

Sometime around 1700 or shortly thereafter, a Presbyterian Society was organized at Greenwich. The Deerfield Congregation was very closely related to this congregation, and had a share of the pastoral services of Andrew Hunter, who was settled at Greenwich.

Also among the earliest congregations which were related to Deerfield was the Society at Pilesgrove which was later called Pittsgrove. When this group began we do not know, but there is a record in the Presbytery of Philadelphia of 1719 concerning the suspension from the ministry of the supply of Gloucester and Pilesgrove. In the early days Philadelphia Presbytery tried to bring about a marriage between the congregations of Pilesgrove and Deerfield, but it was a stormy courtship, with Deerfield doing its share of battle, and the marriage never took place.

The records indicate that a Presbyterian Society was formed at Deerfield in 1732. A group of people with Presbyterian convictions settled in the Deerfield region and their

remoteness from congregations in which the Gospel was preached induced them to form a Presbyterian Society and to design a building for public worship. The first building was a log "meeting house," for just as they did not call their congregation a Church, but a Society, so neither did they call their building a Church, but a "meeting house for public worship." Above all the Puritans were afraid of any kind of sentimental attachment which might become idolatry.

The Deerfield Society was not brought into being through the efforts of any pastor, for they had none. But they were Calvinists — noted for their convictions. The group was ministered to by various supplies from nearby congregations, and by itinerates of various denominations. It was supplied by Daniel Elmer of Fairfield and David Evans, whose training for the ministry was mentioned earlier, and who was for a time the pastor of the Pilesgrove Society.

The Deerfield Congregation, however, did not depend upon occasional ministerial supplies for its life. An early history states: "...Nor were the public exercises of religion omitted when no supplies offered. Some always appeared who had firmness and zeal to conduct the exercises of prayers and praise, & profitable authors were read, to which there was a decent attention; & which we hope have been blessed for the good of souls. This we have reason to believe has been one mean under heaven of securing this church from the ruin which its enemies have meditated. . . ."

The ability of Calvinists to carry on in the absence of ministerial services also strengthened their stubborn and independent faculties. The Deerfield congregation could have had a pastor long before it did. In 1738 Philadelphia Pres-

bytery was anxious to settle David Buckingham as pastor of the Pilesgrove and Deerfield congregations. However, concerning this suggestion Deerfield was utterly opposed. Its opposition seemed to be more related to its quarrel with Pilesgrove than with the character of Mr. Buckingham, who was described as "of great energy, fertile in resources, modest in manner, and thoroughly consecrated to his work." Pilesgrove was very anxious to have him settled as pastor.

After much debate on the floor of Philadelphia Presbytery, it was decided that since Deerfield was utterly opposed to union with Pilesgrove, it be no longer insisted upon; that the congregation at Pilesgrove be at liberty to build a meeting house, provided it be at least *nine miles distant from Deerfield* (the basic bone of contention); that Presbytery write to Mr. Buckingham and ask him to become the minister for the people at Pilesgrove. (Mr. Buckingham did not accept the invitation.)

In its infant stage the Deerfield congregation revealed an independence of mind and spirit.

CHAPTER II

NEW LIGHT BREAKS OUT

Since Presbyterians required a trained ministry, and since no educational institutions existed in the area to serve this purpose, it is natural to expect some makeshift schools to develop. This beginning took place on the banks of the Neshaminy in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. It was not an educational program planned by Synod or Presbytery, but was born of the stark necessity of William Tennant, pastor of the Neshaminy Church. He had four sons who wished to be trained for the ministry. Since no schools were available, he was forced to establish one for them and he opened it to others. This was the beginning of a little school which had a most potent influence upon the whole Church in colonial America, including West Jersey and Deerfield.

William Tennant was born in Ireland and trained to be a priest in the Church of England. However, after serving for a time, he rebelled against the conditions under which the Church operated and was forced to leave the ministry, and so he came over to America, accepted a call to Neshaminy in 1726, and established his school in a log building 20 feet square next to his residence. The school was at first derisively, and then lovingly, called "The Log College."

Tennant had his difficulties with both Philadelphia Presbytery and with the Neshaminy Church. He was able to produce men at his school — men who created a new and significant chapter in the life of the nation. Tennant was a scholar. It was said that he knew Latin as well as his mother tongue, and he was also a zealous and flaming evangelist. Webster* says: "Tennant had the rare gift of attracting to him youth of worth and genius, imbuing them with his healthful spirit; and sending them forth sound in the faith; blameless in life; burning with zeal; unsurpassed as instructive, impressive, and successful preachers."

When the dozen-odd graduates of the Log College hit the country, an explosion took place, for they spoke as prophets of authority and power. The Log College group was under the influence of Whitefield, and they carried the great awakening which began in New England to the Presbyterian churches in the middle colonies.

The revivalistic spirit of the Log College graduates was shocking to the staid, conservative, Puritan leadership. Wherever Gilbert Tennant, leader of the group, preached, the people flocked to come under conviction for their sins. Also the usual excesses of revivalism were present in the stirring movement. Neither did Tennant use the greatest tact in his treatment of the opposition as he preached on "the dangers of an unconverted ministry," meaning his more conservative colleagues.

The opposition to the new awakening split the Church down the middle. The first attack was against the graduates

*Richard Webster, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Joseph M. Wilson, Philadelphia, 1857), p. 366.

of the Log College. In 1738 a group of Log College graduates who had been already ordained established the Presbytery of New Brunswick in the area of New Brunswick, New Jersey. At their first meeting they licensed John Rowland, another graduate of the Log College, and later ordained him. The conservatives were fearful lest the whole Church should be deluged with half-educated enthusiasts. This fear led Synod to pass a regulation permitting Presbyteries to examine and ordain only those candidates who were graduates of New England or European colleges. This did not check the Log College group, but rather caused a split in which the New Brunswick Presbytery was expelled from the Synod. However, it continued on its own merry way, forming the Presbytery of New York.

The New Brunswick group then formed their own Synod and invaded every Presbytery so that the churches in all sections were divided between the "New Lights" and the "Old Lights." It took 17 years to heal the breach which took place.

The history of the Deerfield Church records the influence of this movement. Deerfield and Greenwich linked themselves with the "New Light" group, while Piles Grove and Fairfield remained with their pastors as "Old Lights." Here is a reference to the Log College group in the history of the Deerfield church: "In the year 1740, Mr. Samuel Blair made us a visit. And his preaching was attended with a divine power. Careless sinners were then brought seriously to inquire what they should do to be saved. This engaged the attention of several pious-zealous ministers who came and preached amongst us; and their labors were not in vain in the Lord. Some time after, Mr. Finley preached amongst us,

as well as some others. Their labors were abundantly successful, and there was a glorious day of divine power, and grace.”*

A history of the Greenwich Church indicates that Whitefield was at Greenwich on November 19, 1740, and the Holy Ghost came down again like a rushing mighty wind at Cohansey — some thousands were present.

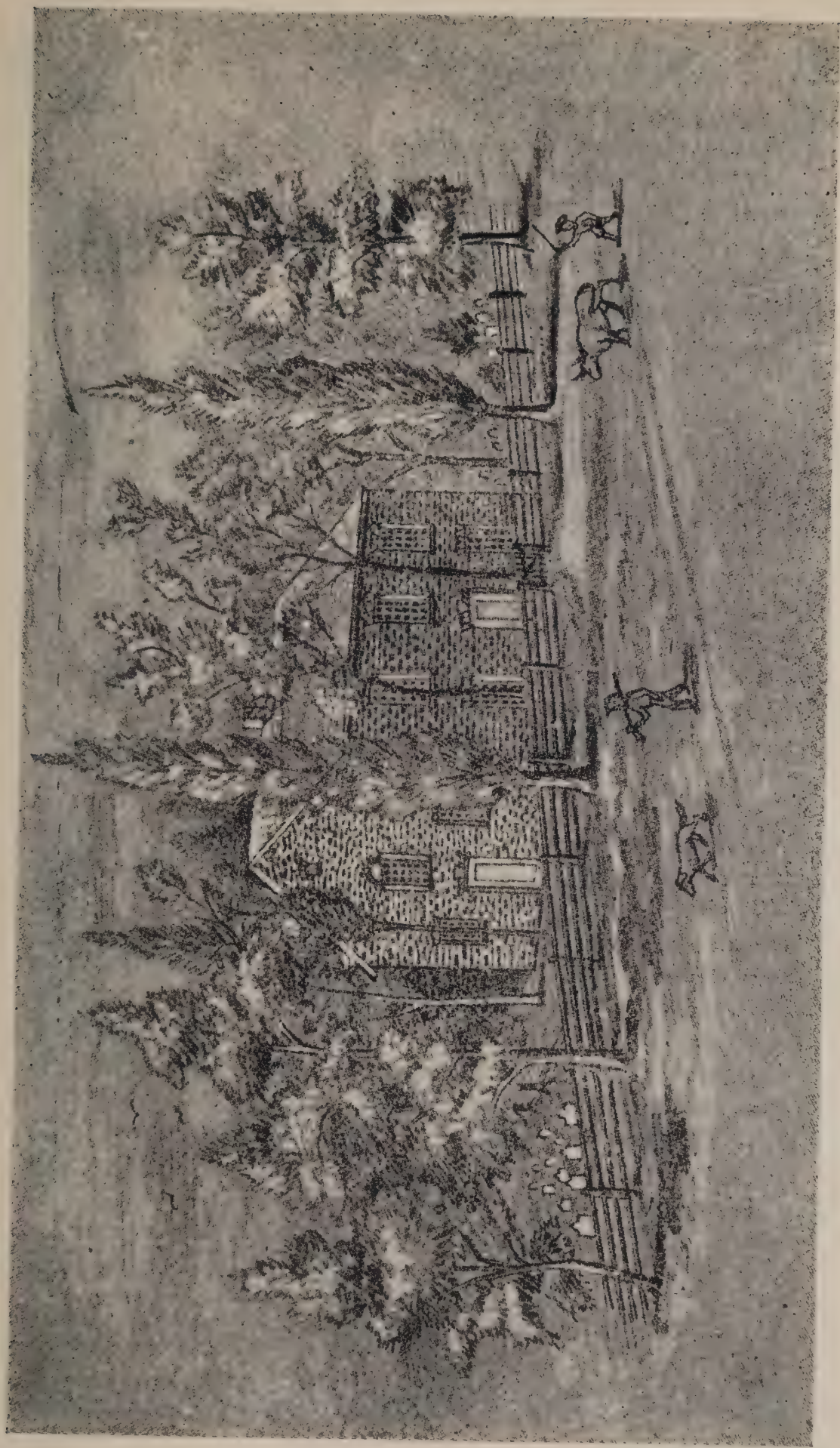
It is to be expected that Whitefield also preached at Deerfield. While the leading members of the “New Light” awakening are linked with the Deerfield Church, it is not to be supposed that they ever settled in either Deerfield or any other church in West Jersey. The fluid conditions of the times were such that the Log College leaders toured the country from their established pastorates, more or less like circuit riders. While they had a potent influence in bringing a spiritual awakening to Deerfield, it was not only here that they labored, but throughout the area with similar results.

From the Log College beginnings, the “New Light” group established the College of New Jersey, which is now Princeton University and which was the dominant center of American Presbyterianism in the eighteenth century. One of the greatest influences of these leaders was educational. It is hard to imagine that a strong educational movement should grow out of an emotional revivalism, but it did. Samuel Blair, whose name was linked with Deerfield, established another log college, and others sprang up throughout the country — so that

*“Early History of Presbyterian Churches,” page 36, *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, Vol. III, No. 1 (March, 1905).

the movement of Presbyterian colleges and universities grew out of the humble beginnings at Neshaminy.

Of the dozen-odd graduates of the Log College, the names of at least five appear in connection with the Deerfield Church. They are Samuel Blair, Gilbert Tennant, Samuel Finley, John Rowland, and Charles Beatty. Of these, Charles Beatty had the closest connection because his daughter Mary was the wife of William Green, and his second daughter Elizabeth, a most charming and beautiful girl, lived in the manse with her sister and there carried on a romance which culminated in her marriage to Philip Vickers Fithian at Deerfield, October 25, 1775. More of this later.



The Stone Presbyterian Church of Deerfield — Built in the Year 1771
(Reproduced from the sesqui-centennial history of Deerfield Presbyterian Church)



The Stone Presbyterian Church of Deerfield — Enlarged in 1859
(Reproduced from the sesqui-centennial history of Deerfield Presbyterian Church)

CHAPTER III

"FEARLESS OF HUMAN FROWNS"

"Dear, honest, aged Saint, in Fullness of Days, & rather by the Scythe of Time, than Disease, hast thou fallen in the Dust — Without a Wish for popular Applause; & quite fearless of human Frowns, the necessary & most humbling Doctrines of Religion, with great Plainness, yet with substantial & luminous Arguments, have been thy chief & steady Aim." (P. 118, Fithian Journal)

In 1746 the Rev. Andrew Hunter was ordained and installed as pastor of the Greenwich and Deerfield churches. This was the beginning of regular and established ministerial services at Deerfield. According to the arrangement Deerfield was to have one-third of his services and Greenwich, two-thirds. Naturally he lived at Greenwich, going to Deerfield every third Sunday for services.

Although the records are not clear, it appears that for a time the two congregations were constituted as one Church with the elders of the two groups serving as one Session. The people worshipped in their separate communities only for the sake of convenience. During this time a group of Deerfield members sought to buy a parsonage farm in order to facilitate the possibility of having a minister settled in Deerfield. For

doing this on their own, independent of the Session, they were rebuked.

Andrew Hunter served as pastor of Greenwich until his death in 1775. The original relations with Deerfield continued until 1760 — at which time the two congregations were separated.

Andrew Hunter was from Ireland and it is not known where he received his education. At any rate he typified the combination of zeal and of scholarship which was characteristic of “New Light” Presbyterianism.

Under his leadership both churches grew in depth and in spirit. At that time Greenwich was one of the largest and most influential congregations in West Jersey and included a large proportion of the influential leaders of Cumberland County. It is noted that under his leadership the “New Light” congregations of Greenwich and Deerfield attracted wavering “Old Light” Presbyterians of Fairfield.

In addition to his evangelical warmth, Andrew Hunter, characteristic of colonial Presbyterians, was an ardent patriot in favor of the Revolution. Enoch Fithian’s history of Greenwich states: “No other person, probably, was more influential in enkindling the flame of patriotism which burned with so much ardor in the bosoms of the citizens of Cumberland County than the Rev. Andrew Hunter.” During the Revolution the Greenwich Church was a depot for clothing, blankets, and other needs of the revolutionary soldiers.

Philip Vickers Fithian, a Greenwich boy, was a member of this congregation and was inspired and guided through Hunter’s leadership. If Fithian is any reflection of Hunter, the

pastor of the congregation could not have been in the dark at the time of the Tea Burning.

The relationship between Greenwich and Deerfield was broken in 1760, no doubt for practical purposes, and because it was believed that Deerfield was in a good enough condition to stand independently. It is recorded that at that time the Deerfield Church was composed of 60 families.

For seven years the Church was furnished with supplies from Presbytery. Among these was Simon Williams, who spent two years in Deerfield. By then the congregation had purchased the parsonage farm. Williams served for a salary of £70 and the use of the parsonage, with the agreement that the members of the church cultivate the farm for his benefit. It is indicated that "under his ministry a number were brought from darkness to light and from the power of sin and Satan to God."

In 1767 the Rev. Enoch Green was invited to take pastoral charge of the church. He served Deerfield ten years, until the time of his death, and he gave without a doubt the most outstanding and capable leadership the church has enjoyed. He established an informal school for the training of pastors, and was noted both for his depth and for his scholarship. During his pastorate the stone "meeting house" which is now being rededicated was erected in its original form.

Fithian's Journal records a description of Enoch Green by one who was annoyed when he stopped a dance in Bucks County which was being attended by the two Miss Beatties of Neshaminy. We will hear of them again, for shortly afterwards they came to occupy the manse at Deerfield. The description reads: "He came to preach . . . (but) had something

more in his head than Preaching. He was a slim man, wore a large wig, said little, read his sermons. . .” The description goes on to say about the Beatty girls: “The Girls led us as brisk a country dance as we were able to follow, all the week through. . . They lived genteelly, and merrily . . . the two uncommonly merry Miss Beatties . . . ” (Pp. 96-97 Journal.)

Mr. Green was in nowise spectacular. He brought depth, understanding, education, and superior abilities in every respect. It is recorded that during his pastorate thirteen members were added to the church. Certainly his value to the congregation and the community could not be measured by membership statistics. It is interesting to compare these with the other statistics of his ministry. They are: Baptisms administered, 109; Burials, 101; Marriages, 92.*

As William Tennant established his school at Neshaminy, so Enoch Green established a classical school at Deerfield to prepare young people for higher education and the ministry. One of his first pupils was Philip Vickers Fithian, whose Journal is about the most authoritative source of material in existence for revealing characteristics of pre-Revolutionary America. It also tells much about the attitudes and manners of Deerfield.

In June, 1770, Enoch Green was married to Mary Beatty and when they came to Deerfield her sister, Elizabeth, joined them. The two “uncommonly merry Miss Beatties” certainly added a wholesome touch to the manse. Their domestic happiness is mentioned as one of the assets of his ministry, along with his many traits of scholarship and ability.

The Presbyterian Society of Deerfield had great pride

*As given in *A Biographical Sketch of Enoch Green*.

in the leadership which Enoch Green exerted in colonial America. They responded nobly to his appeal for a new house of worship — thus the beginning of the present “meeting house” came into being. The walls of the new church were built of stone; quarried in the township; dressed by the members of the congregation; and laid slowly until the building was complete. It was a nearly square building, standing not far from the log meeting house. In 1771 the congregation first gathered in their new house of worship and praised God for their many blessings.

It is said that for the next four years the church enjoyed the greatest prosperity in its history. No doubt this would have continued for some time had it not been for the Revolutionary War which ended this ministry.

CHAPTER IV

BUT I LOVE COHANSEY

The Journals of Philip Vickers Fithian of Greenwich and Deerfield are a gold mine of information concerning colonial America. He was born and raised in Greenwich and was educated under the supervision of the two ministers associated with Deerfield, Andrew Hunter as pastor of the Greenwich church and Enoch Green of Deerfield. We may expect something of their reflection in him. It was Enoch Green of Deerfield who prepared him for his college course at Princeton from 1770-1772. After graduation he studied theology to prepare for the ministry, for one year.

At that time Robert Carter, an extremely wealthy plantation owner from Virginia, was seeking a tutor for his children. President John Witherspoon of Princeton suggested Fithian, who went to Nomini Hall, Virginia, for a year. He then returned to Greenwich and was licensed to preach the gospel by Philadelphia Presbytery on December 6, 1774, and preached his first sermon in Deerfield. He then went to the frontier as a circuit rider between the years 1775-1776. All of this time he was deeply in love with Elizabeth Beatty who lived in the manse at Deerfield. Consequently, loving references to Deerfield appear throughout his Journal. Typical

is his remark while describing the luxury of the Virginia estate to say, "And in spite of my resolution, when I am convinced that my situation is more advantageous here, yet I wish to be there."

His Journals are very significant because they reveal the Puritan strictness and the highly intellectual climate of Greenwich and Deerfield — in contrast with the highly social and luxurious life of Nomini Hall; again in contrast with the poverty of means, morals, and ideas of the frontier areas.

Nomini Hall is luxury sharply contrasted with the Spartan strictness of Jersey. Mr. Carter possessed 60,000 acres of land which was served by a colony of 600 negroes. Fithian never could feel at home in the social climate of Virginia, though he enjoyed it on occasions. He always felt something lacking in the "chatting before and after sermon on gallantry," in the spiritual harangues from the pulpit, and in the general religious coolness of plantation life.

At times he wished to join in the levity and notes his embarrassment because he could not dance and says, "Poor me! I must hobble or sit quiet in the corner!" Such ideas would usually trouble his Puritan conscience and his Journal would record, "Can I look at my actions and not blush?"

One of the most revealing characteristics in the Journal is the revelation of the moral tone and the standards of the times. Fithian seemed to consider the consumption of alcoholic beverages on about the same plane as the consumption of food, and throughout he speaks of the quality of the wines which were served. However, he indicates a disapproval of drunkenness. In contrast to the free spirit that is indicated in this regard, he writes: "I am ashamed that I may record here

what does no honor to my old aunt. I saw her with three partners around a table playing cards at that vulgar game fit only for the meanest gambler." Throughout the entire Journal we see a strict though open-minded Puritan amid the strangeness of an almost foreign land which did not share his spirit. His uneasiness about the dance floor did not prevent his admiring the beautiful dances of the young people of Virginia, "moving easily to the sound of well performed music and in perfect regularity."

Fithian returned to Jersey after his stay at Nomini Hall and was examined for the ministry at a meeting of Presbytery at Pittsgrove. He was ordained on Tuesday, the 6th of December. His Journal for that day reveals this prayer: "I feel myself not able; I feel myself unqualified; I feel myself unworthy, and every way vastly unequal to this great undertaking. Oh, give me strength, O Shepherd of Israel. Furnish me with every necessary qualification; with Wisdom, Fidelity, Zeal, Prudence, & Perseverance. May I have in my own heart much of the meekness and Spirit of the Gospel, & may I have a sense of my duty in these times of distraction & Misery. Furnish me with a uniform and unbiased love for my Country; and give me courage to engage in every method that has a tendency to save her from Ruin, even if my life should be in Danger in the Competition." (P. Journal 246.)

His Journal recorded that he preached his first sermon in Deerfield and was embarrassed because he prayed that the King may become a nursing mother and the Queen a nursing father to the Church! It was during this period that some days the record showed a certain concern over a quantity of tea

which was stored in Greenwich. We find this note: "The County met at Cohansie-Bridge & Chose a committee, & it was recommended to them to examine into & take proper care of the aforesaid Goods. . . ." (*ibid*, p. 247.) The next night the goods were violently consumed by fire. The last notation of this period was, "I preached at Deerfield — not much dashed." (*ibid*, p. 258.)

In May, 1775, he left Greenwich as a circuit rider for the frontier of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. To bring the gospel to this area was to endure the most severe hardships. It was a battle against nature and a battle against the roughness of life which exists in the wild. He could never be at home with the vulgarness of the people, and yet he sensed that he was sowing the seeds of the nation, and so continued his work, going deeper and deeper into the frontier. On many, many occasions he was forced to sleep with the whole family in one room, and he always revealed his inner embarrassment. His Journal also reveals the attitude of the people toward the clergy.

Fithian was all American. He was practical. Concerning his practical approach to preaching, he recorded this note in his Journal on June 4, 1775: "I preached twice; the Assembly were very attentive; I spoke with ease, & made only a very little Use of my Notes, which is a vast, almost an essential, Recommendation here — Preach without Papers; produce casuistic Divinity; seem earnest and serious; & you will be listened to with Patience & Wonder; Both your hands will be seized, & almost shook off so soon as you are out of the Church, & you will be dunn'd by half the Society to honour them with your Company after Sermon. Read your Sermons,

if they be sound & sententious as Witherspoon's, copious & Flowery as Hervey's, & read off with the Ease and Dignity of Davis — Their Backs will be up at once, their attention all gone, their Noses will grow red as their Wigs, And, let me whisper this, you may get your Dinner where you Breakfasted." (*ibid*, p. 22.)

Fithian on the frontier revealed his intellectual capacities, his Calvinistic faith, and his love of freedom. His Journal also indicates the hardship of the ministers in colonial America: "They must expend much Time, & Labour & Money previously. Afterwards they receive a trifling & inadequate Annuity. Their whole Time, however, & close Attention, is required. And all their performances must pass a Trial, & be applauded or damned by every peevish, Gospel-crammed Pharisee. Poor Levites! It lies upon us to look out in Time, for a better Heaven. Sour, or tasteless, are the greatest number of our Enjoyments here! . . . " (P. 62, Fithian Journal)

He returned to Deerfield and there married the girl of his dreams, Elizabeth Beatty, on October 25, 1775 — the last marriage performed by Enoch Green in that year. She certainly was one of the loveliest ladies of colonial America, for all who contacted her were enthusiastic in their praise. One of the most charming features of his Journal is his continuous love and regard for "Liza." At one time he even mused over the fact that he would continue to love her with the same ardour at the withered age of 60 "supporting a pipe in her toothless mouth." Shortly after his marriage he joined the Revolutionary Forces and died a little less than a year later when an epidemic swept through the Army. His lovely bride later married his cousin, Joel Fithian, of Greenwich.

CHAPTER V

FREEDOM'S BATTLE

Presbyterians were psychologically and of necessity on the side of the American Revolution. They were naturally opposed to tyranny and privilege of all kinds, and to the Crown which supported the established Church of England, with whom they had so many battles in the struggle for religious freedom.

In this battle for freedom the Presbyterians contributed their share. In addition to the members of the Deerfield congregation who gave their lives, two of the pastors died serving their country. Enoch Green, chaplain in Washington's Army, died on December 2, 1776, due to exposure to what was called "camp fever."

There are some interesting notes concerning life in the Revolutionary days. Mrs. Green endured great sacrifices by refusing to drink tea during the period of the Revolutionary War, even though she was partial to it as her beverage. There is also a note that on July 20, 1775, Mr. Green preached to a company of officers and enlisted men who attended the Deerfield Church.

The widows of the Deerfield manse with the Green children had to vacate the parsonage for another notable pastor,

John Brainard, who served during the remainder of the Revolutionary period and until he died in 1781. John Brainard was the successor to his brother David who was the famous missionary to the Indians. For many years John Brainard travelled far and wide throughout Jersey in order to bring salvation to the Red Men. The Mission to the Indians was the real career of his life.

At the beginning of the Revolution he was carrying on missionary activity among the white settlers in a sparsely settled area from the Presbyterian "meeting house" in Mt. Holly. The "meeting house" was burned by the British soldiers in the Revolutionary War in 1767, which was one reason for his moving to Deerfield in 1777.

During this pastorate the Methodists came into the picture in relation to the Presbyterian Church. This, which was a problem, was clouded because in every instance it was connected with Fithian Stratton who had been previously rebuked for conduct unbecoming to a Christian. When Stratton asked to hold Methodist services, the Session answered with a flat "no" and told him to "sit at the feet of Immanuel and learn to be meek and lowly in heart." At another time when Stratton asked the Session's permission to invite Methodists to conduct services in his home, the Session responded that it is not conducive to the health of congregations to permit Methodist teachers "with whose principles we are unacquainted" to preach within the bounds of the Presbyterian Church.

It may seem strange to us to think that the Session was unfamiliar with Methodist principles. It is not so strange when

we realize that Methodism had hardly come into existence at the time of the Revolution and was still in its infancy.

The Methodist controversy within the congregation came to a conclusion with the suspension on December 18, 1781, of ten members of the Presbyterian Congregation for joining the Methodists.

John Brainard died at Deerfield on March 18, 1781. He will be chiefly remembered for his work among the Indians, whom he loved. Even at Deerfield, he retained oversight of the Indian missions in the State. When he came to Deerfield he was in poor health, and though this limited his activity and his service, his strength of Christian character was felt. Deerfield will always boast of his pastorate and point with pride to his gravestone in the churchyard.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION IS AT A LOW EBB

Following the American Revolution was perhaps the most decadent period in American religious life. The religious fervor of an earlier period died out. Only a handful of the students at Princeton University, which had been established to prepare young men for the Presbyterian ministry, professed to be Christians. The energies of the people were consumed by the war and they faced a confusing aftermath. Also the anti-religious attitude of the French Revolution was influential among the intellectual class. Unbelief, religious indifference, moral laxity, and confusion were widespread. For the two decades after the War of the Revolution, American Christianity had less vitality than at any time in its history.

What was true of the nation was also true of the Deerfield Church. At no time in its history do we find it in such a dreary and floundering condition as during the years right after the war. After the death of Brainard, the church was vacant for some time although it was supplied for a while by the Rev. Joseph Montgomery and others. On the 25th of June, the Rev. Simeon Hyde was ordained and installed as pastor. He no doubt had the shortest pastoral ministry in the history of the Church. He died seven weeks later, on

August 10th, after what is described as a successful effort in the ministry with brilliant prospects looming before him.

This was followed by another short pastorate of William Pickles, who was installed in June, 1786, and deposed from the ministry on November 24th, 1787. An account relates this as charitably as possible and simply states “. . . and was silenced by Presbytery.” It is related that he was eloquent in the pulpit, but lived a very inconsistent life.

Following this pastorate, which no doubt was a blow to an already weakened congregation, the Church was vacant and without a pastor for eight years, although it was occasionally supplied. The dark clouds, following each other in rapid succession, reduced the Church to a low condition of discouragement.

Though the spiritual depression left its scars, it was not permanent. This was true in the nation as well as at Deerfield. The turning point at Deerfield came with the arrival of the Reverend John Davenport, who was installed as pastor on August 12, 1795. He again built up the Church on the basis of hard work and the sound faith. An account says that during his pastorate the darkness gave way to light. Any historian of the Deerfield Church will praise the Lord for John Davenport, because careful records were established in his ministry, and from this time forward the historical records may be found in the Session books. All history prior to Davenport is a matter of searching numerous volumes in numerous places.

John Davenport was at Deerfield ten years until his health gave way in 1805. During this time sixty-four members were added to the Church, which at the time of his coming had

eighty-five communicants. This large number, considering the former membership, is particularly significant in view of a Covenant for Church Membership, which the Session adopted, no doubt under his guidance, on March 25, 1796, as the basis for membership in the Deerfield Congregation. This Covenant was probably adopted as a break on the moral laxity of the time and as a means of tightening the membership requirements. It is a most severe covenant, and unusual for its strictness. This becomes even more evident when compared with modern standards for Church membership. The Covenant reads as follows:

“COVENANT”

“You do now in the awful presence of the dread majesty of heaven and earth, and before angels and men, with the utmost seriousness and sincerity of your soul, avouch the Lord Jehovah to be your Sovereign Lord, and supreme good through Jesus Christ, and solemnly devote and give up yourself to his fear and service, and to the Lord Jesus, as your only mediator, head and Lord, receiving of him, and relying on him, as the great High Priest, Prophet, and King of your salvation, and to the Holy Ghost, as your only Sanctifier and Comforter, to be the temple for him to dwell in — and you do professedly covenant, never to be broken, to be for him and no other, to obey and serve him forever — and engage yourself by the most sacred ties to observe all God’s commandments, seeking his glory and to walk in Christian fellowship and a conscientious performance of Christian duties, in all the ordinances of Christ, to be enjoyed in his church, and in this particular church, especially the word, sacraments and

prayer, so long as God in his providence shall continue you here. You also promise and engage through grace strengthening you, to endeavor at all times to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, ever avoiding all stumbling blocks and occasions of offense, as becomes the disciples of the holy and peaceable Jesus. Moreover, you promise to exercise a Christian watchfulness and inspection over us of the church; and to submit to the same from us — to subject yourself to the government and discipline of Christ in this his church; ever ready to give and to receive with candor and meekness all such counsels, warnings and reproofs, as occasion from time to time shall require. Finally, you promise to use all proper means and methods to engage those in a religious course that divine providence has, or may commit to your more immediate charge, and doing what in you lies that they may be the Lord's. All this you solemnly promise and engage with dependence upon the Grace of God in Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Redeemer, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

"I then in the name of this church declare you a member (or Members) in full communion with it, invested with all the rights and privileges of it, and commend you to God, and the good word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified. We (the members of this church) do promise and covenant (by God's grace) to walk towards you in brotherly love, according to the rules given us by Christ. We will watch over you, not for your halting, but for the good and edification of your soul, and make you a partaker (or partakers) of the ordinances of Christ amongst us:- and we will counsel, warn,

reprove, and comfort you, as the matter may call for. Now the God of grace grant that we may so live together in his faith and fear, that we may meet at last and dwell together in his everlasting kingdom. Amen.'

CHAPTER VII

BUILDING ON A PURITAN TRADITION

The pastorate of John Davenport marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Deerfield Church. From that time forward it has been a matter of continuing steadily, and building on the Puritan tradition of the founding fathers. If there has been nothing which has been particularly spectacular during this period, neither has the existence of the Church been seriously challenged. The services of worship have continued, the records have been maintained, and the congregation in the old stone Church has been a well-rooted and continuing institution in this farming community.

While the congregation has not been particularly in the main stream of Presbyterianism, the currents which have influenced national Church life have been felt in Deerfield also. In 1817 the national organization which became the American Sunday School Union was organized to promote Sunday Schools throughout the nation. On March 29, 1820, the Sabbath School Association of Deerfield Street was organized. The Constitution of the Deerfield organization was not one which would be approved by any reputable Board of Christian Education at the present time, but the important fact is that this Sunday School was organized at the time

when they were being organized throughout the nation. Probably the constitution was similar to the constitutions of other groups.

The constitution prescribed that anyone who subscribed twenty-five cents annually was a member of the society. The educational stimulus was based on rewards. To memorize any of the following would entitle the learner to one blue ticket: ten verses of hymns, six questions of the shorter catechism, four questions of the larger catechism; eight blue tickets could buy one red ticket, which was valued at one cent; twenty-five red tickets could be cashed in for one of Watt's PSALM BOOKS valued at twenty-five cents, etc. In other words, the person who memorized forty-six shorter Catechism questions would earn in the process a twenty-five-cent copy of Watt's PSALM BOOK.

The opening of railroads to the west and the settling of the mid-western frontier created a new interest in Home Missions. In 1859 the Presbyterian Church sent its greatest home missionary, Sheldon Jackson, to the end of a western railroad line at La Crescent, Minnesota. In 1862 a Ladies' Home Missionary Society was established in Deerfield. These events are certainly not directly related, but at a time when the Church was beginning to take a greater responsibility for Home Missions it was normal that a Home Missionary Society should develop in Deerfield. The initiation fee for this society was twenty-five cents and the dues were ten cents monthly. This group was organized during the pastorate of the Rev. R. Hammill Davis.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century a great interest in Foreign Missions developed throughout all of the

Protestant world. A Women's Foreign Missionary Society was organized on February 23, 1872. It is interesting to note that the Foreign Missionary Society was much more responsive at the time it was organized to the needs of the Mission field than the Home Mission organization. Soon after they were organized the society agreed to pledge \$50 yearly for the support of a native worker in Africa. This amount was later increased by the active organization.

Perhaps the one major characterization of the Church during the nineteenth century was its sturdy, strict Puritanism. The Session seriously took upon itself the obligation of maintaining the moral standards of the membership of the Church through supervision and discipline. Cases of discipline were regular features of Session meetings. When members were cited to appear before the Session, they did. Yet it may be questioned whether the use of church discipline decidedly improved the morals of the church members.

The stone building which was built during the ministry of William Green in 1771 was enlarged in 1859 during the pastorate of the Rev. Thomas W. Cattell.

Two wars and the industrial revolution have changed the character of America so that the Deerfield Church which is now being rededicated faces a challenge that is different from any which it has faced in its previous history. Mechanization and speedy transportation have so changed the rural life, that rural churches face critical conditions everywhere. Yet it is still true that the rural life is the seed-bed of the nation. Will the Church be alert to the needs of the changing rural life? The Church largely lost its influence among the industrial workers of America, partly because it was not quick

enough to understand the shiftings of population which took place with urban industrialization. Deerfield is symbolic of the changing conditions in rural America. Here are small mechanized farms, migrant workers, and the centralization of the large-scale corporation farm. Will the Church meet the needs of all these differing rural workers and plant its roots firmly in their minds and hearts? This is the greatness of the Puritan Church in the old Rural America which is passing off the scene. The Deerfield Church is again faced with a great opportunity.

I love old Deerfield Church,
The church my fathers loved,
The church whose doctrines pure,
These hundred years have proved;
And may she many a hundred more
In power and usefulness endure.

I love the dear old church:
To me 'tis dearer now
Than e'en cathedral grand,
With all its splendid show.
For full a century has flown
Since rose its walls of solid stone.

I love the old, old church,
For sainted ones at rest
Worshipped devoutly here,
And now are with the blest.
Their memory sweet we cherish still,
And cherish it, we ever will.

I love, I love our church,
The birthplace of my soul;
And whereso'er I roam,
O'er earth from pole to pole,
No spot there'll be so sweet to me,
As this I love so tenderly.

God bless old Deerfield Church,
Protect from every foe:
Nurtured of God, may she
To large proportions grow:
Till time itself shall cease to be,
Lost in a vast eternity.

Written by the Reverend R. Hamill Davis, Ph. D., Pastor 1860-1875, for the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the present church building. The building is now 176 years old.

